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Migration Transition in Serbia: A Realistic Future or just a Hypothetical Model?

Reduction and ageing of the population are two clearly identifiable characteristics of contemporary Serbia. From the demographic perspective, the continuation of these trends is quite certain in the very long-term. Traditionally, the Republic of Serbia has been a country of economic emigration which has nevertheless experienced several inflows of immigrants consisting mainly of ethnic Serbs from the territory of the former SFR Yugoslavia. Among the traditional emigration countries for Serbian nationals, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Sweden still are very attractive. Owing to the existing, well-developed social networks from the earlier periods, these countries are chiefly of interest to people with a secondary education or lower, which is the general characteristic of Serbian emigrants in Europe, unlike those to the overseas states during the last two decades. The process of emigration to the EU countries has been facilitated since the beginning of 2010, when Serbia entered the White Schengen List, a list of the countries whose nationals do not require visas to travel to the Schengen Area. Immigration to Serbia in recent years mainly consists of Serbian nationals who, once their working careers abroad came to an end, return either to enjoy their pension, in the case of the first large emigration waves of the late 1960s and early 1970s, or to find a new job in Serbia. Foreigners constitute the minority of recent immigrants to Serbia. Most of them are not from the EU countries.

Current trends in migration flows: the data issue

Due to the problems of availability and quality of data, it is not easy to give even a rough estimate of the overall size of immigration to, and emigration from, Serbia. It is probably even impossible to give a reliable estimate of its changes in time due to political changes in respect to borders and name of the country during the last decade, which particularly affected quality of migration data by citizenship. Furthermore, there is a lack of data for some important destination countries, particularly in respect of return flows. SEEMIG, the current strategic project, funded by the European Union's South-East Europe Programme, which aims to better understand and address longer term migratory, human capital and demographic processes of South-East Europe, showed that the best source of information on international migration flows from and to Serbia are the data from the destination countries in spite of numerous gaps. Data analysis based upon these sources (the Eurostat on-line database, the websites of national statistical institutes, the OECD International Migration Database including records from Serbian Ministry of Interior) shows that for 2009 to 2011, the most intensive, officially-registered migration flows, regardless of direction, were those with Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Italy, USA, Switzerland, Hungary and France. Serbia has a negative migration balance with almost all the countries for which data is available. The highest net emigration (-1,703) is that resulting from the flows with Italy, one of the new emigrant destinations. Due to the serious problems of data availability in the last decade, partly induced by political changes, in respect to recent migration flows from/to Serbia, the outlook regarding migration trends has to be based on quite rough estimate of the current net migration balance of the country, which should be between -10,000 and -15,000 persons per year (ISS, 2013).

The Czech or Polish pattern of transition: what is more realistic migration scenario for Serbia?

Given the lack of comparable historical data on migration and the fact that migration is highly sensitive to economic and political conditions, we could not rely solely on an analysis of the past migration trends in Serbia. Instead, we had to resort to establishing hypothetical scenarios by exploring analogies with other countries. Then, the effects of different migration scenarios in Serbia were examined using the population

dynamics model based upon the probabilistic concept of projecting vital components. Due to data limitations, modelling of migration component had to be confined to "artificial" net migration. Furthermore, no uncertainty of the future migration trend was estimated as the prediction intervals could be rather unrealistic given the existing historical data on migration in Serbia.

Following the political changes in 2000, the approach to the European Union reinstates itself as Serbia's main foreign policy goal. European integrations and gaining the full EU membership were marked as strategic goals of the entire society, which resulted in the candidate status granted to Serbia on March 1, 2012. Thus, the paper refers to the EU future as to the most probable one. If we suppose a positive outcome of the accession process while having in mind the migration effects of the EU enlargements from the last decade along with emigration background of the country, a logical question could be raised: Can Serbia avoid the potential intense migration outflows in the early post-accession period?

Two different future patterns of migration transition were taken into consideration, both based on empiric evidence from the recent EU enlargements. One could refer to very slow transition from current net emigration to zero migration balance until 2040 (the revival of 1980s), and eventually to modest net immigration by 2050, but including the post-accession emigration wave. It could be labelled as "Polish scenario" as being closest to the migration transition observed in Poland, characterised by high native emigration levels, rather low long-term immigration levels and frequent short term types of migration patterns. Another one, exceptionally optimistic scenario from the current viewpoint, would assume the reversal of the net migration trend almost linearly towards stable net immigration by 2050, but excluding intense labour outflows following the accession date. It could be referred to as the "Czech scenario", as Czech Republic has high immigration levels and, at the same time, low levels of native emigration.

It could not be expected that Serbia can join the EU before 2021 given the current status of the country in respect to the accession process. In the meanwhile, the net migration losses might reduce slightly, owing to the financial crisis in Europe, which has already been observed. Simultaneously, the slow economic recovery should reduce unemployment, which could also lead to a decrease in emigration. Immigration, consisted primarily of nationals who finished their working careers abroad, will probably remain more or less stable over time. Overall, a reduction in the net migration loss of some 10 per cent every five years until the EU accession date could be assumed as a realistic (Kupiszewski et al, 2012). In addition, the perspective of Serbia's joining the EU may generate a deferred demand for emigration, to be realized after Serbia's accession.

The EU accession date is considered as the turning point for future migration pattern of Serbia as regards the way of transition. The *Czech scenario* would undoubtedly imply the significant growth of the economy as a necessary precondition, which is not recognized as a much probable future by economists in the next two decades (Šuković, 2009). Besides, the changes in institutional and legal framework, integration policies and social attitudes would be at least equally important factors if a positive climate for attracting foreigners and reducing emigration represents a strategic goal. In that sense, the significance of immigration from third countries will most likely rise over time, given the tradition of exchanges between Serbia and the countries of the *Non-Aligned Movement*. Such a trend could be anticipated from the recent annual flow data even the inflows from the South-Eastern Europe based on unbalanced demographic structure among the region countries could also contribute to the migration transition of Serbia.

On the other side, the *Polish scenario*, characterised by a large-scale emigration of an explosive but relatively short-lived nature is supported by the results of the representative survey from 2010 aimed at estimating potential for emigration from Serbia (Baćević et al, 2011). There are also strong pull factors ahead; in the late 2010s and early 2020s, the working life of the post-war baby boom population in Western Europe will come to an end, creating a huge gap on the labour market. Indeed, there are several important similarities between the two countries: an income gap in relation to the EU average in the pre-

accession decade; large resources of unused or underused labour, especially in rural areas and small towns; a long tradition of international migration and developed migration networks abroad, particularly in old EU countries (Kupiszewski et al, 2012). Yet, the number of potential emigrants from Serbia could be significantly depleted before the EU accession date, mainly due to retiring of the vast majority of the post-war baby boom generations, as compared to the situation in the new, post-socialist Member States during the period from 2004 to 2009. Besides, the return migration of Serbs who reach retirement age abroad together with immigration of foreigners will to some extent reduce the losses caused by emigration after the EU accession. Therefore in the *Polish scenario* the annual net emigration during the first five years after the accession date could be estimated at -3.5 per thousand of the 2011 Census population comparing to the current -2 per thousand. After the short period of high volume emigration, it is reasonable to expect a rapid reduction of net migration loss and, finally, a turn towards positive net migration some 10-15 years later. In the *Czech scenario*, the positive migration balance, estimated to reach 2 per thousand of the 2011 Census population in 2051, would occur ten years earlier as no huge net outflow related to the EU accession is expected.

Impact of migration trends on the future population of Serbia

The probabilistic model of population dynamics in Serbia employed for evaluating different migration scenarios up to 2050 represents cohort-component population projection model that produced 10,000 future paths by Monte Carlo-style simulations. This method enabled deriving probabilistic statements on future population. Besides two main migration scenarios, hypothetic *status-quo* and *no migration* were produced for assessment of migration impact on future population dynamics.

According to the *Polish scenario*, the population of Serbia will be most probably smaller by 6.2% in 2051 than it would be if there was no migration component. Even 43% of this decline is due migration-related, potential, but not realised, natural change. Then, the size of the labour force resources will be in the most probable case smaller by 8.4%, the education age population by 7.4%, while the old-age dependency ratio and labour market dependency ratio will increase by 8.4% and 4.4%, respectively comparing to *no migration* scenario.

According to the *Czech scenario*, the population of Serbia will be most probably bigger by 2.2% in 2051 than it would be if there was no migration component. Similarly, the size of the labour force resources will be in the most probable case bigger by 2.6% and the education age population by 5.0%, while the old-age dependency ratio and labour market dependency ratio will decrease by 2.6% and 0.8%, respectively comparing to *no migration* scenario.

Logically, the most striking differences are between the *status quo* scenario based on constant annual net emigration rate of -2 per thousand of the 2011 Census population and *Czech scenario* that ends with the positive annual net migration rate of 2 per thousand by 2050.

The overall conclusion of the population dynamics model exercise is that current migration trends in Serbia have a negative impact on population development, as they result in a decrease of the population size of the country, reduce the total number of births, reduce labour resources and have an adverse effect on the age structure of the population. Thus, the reduction of net emigration should be one of the tasks of population and economic policies. More generally, a team of researchers from the IDEA research project (Okólski, 2012), who analyzed the migration processes across European countries, argued that, in the long run, the transformation of a country's economic system leads to a change in the migration pattern from net emigration to net immigration. Yet, there are a number of socio-economic factors which will certainly continue to encourage the emigration of Serbian citizens, including low rates of economic activity, reinforced by the global economic crisis, a decrease in investment, the high rate of unemployment,

structural unemployment, the low standard of living, political instability, the underdevelopment of civil society and strong regional differences. A possible increase in immigration would be brought about not only by the return of Serbs, but also by an inflow of foreigners. This would lead to an increase in socio-cultural diversity and would require the development of integration strategies. Currently, it seems to be a quite challenging for Serbian society according to the recent surveys (Baćević et al, 2011). Furthermore, migration component of the population development is not visible in the political, economic, academic and public discourse of Serbian society. In the strategic documents which the state adopted towards migration, there has not even been an attempt to find solutions regarding a more complete political response towards international migration. A sufficiently developed consciousness of the political and expert community on the significance of the migratory phenomenon does not exist in Serbia, nor are the potentials completely recognized of including migration in development programmes for the country's revival, including demographic revitalization, and particularly the requirement to comprehensively act in this sphere is underdeveloped. Thus it is necessary to convey the findings of various researches regarding migration to decision makers (ISS, 2013).

Economic and social development of Serbia would not only contribute to a decrease of emigration but would also accelerate immigration into the country. Apart from that, it is important to promote registration of all types of immigrants, define target groups of immigrant population and develop integration measures such as language learning, education or active measures of employing foreigners. At the same time, it is important to create a positive climate towards immigration, develop tolerance and acceptance of immigrants in Serbia. Since most of these conditions are missing currently, migration transition seems to be closer to the hypothetical model rather than to the realistic future.

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